

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of facilitating services, said method comprising:
 - generating listing information identifying a service provider;
 - making said listing information available to potential clients of said service provider; and
 - receiving an agreement from said service provider to use a first service-enhancing system to provide services to each client obtained as a result of said making said listing information available.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - generating second listing information identifying a second service provider;
 - receiving an agreement from said second service provider to use a second service-enhancing system having at least one feature absent from said first service-enhancing system;
 - making said second listing information available to at least some of said potential clients; and
 - enhancing the availability to said at least some potential clients of said second listing information.
3. A method of facilitating services, said method comprising:
 - generating listing information identifying a service provider;
 - making said listing information available to potential clients of said service provider; and
 - receiving an agreement from said service provider to adhere to certain standards of care in providing services to each client obtained as a result of said making said listing information available, said certain standards being more specific, or higher, than those generally accepted or legally required to practice in the industry of said service provider.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising:
 - receiving an agreement from said service provider to use a computer software-based process to assure that said service provider adheres to said certain standards of care.

5. The method of claim 4, further comprising:
receiving a payment from said service provider for using said computer software-based process.

6. The method of claim 5, further comprising:

5 receiving an agreement from said service provider not to pass on to any client any cost of using said computer software-based process.

7. A method of facilitating services, said method comprising:

10 providing in a profile database profile data representing characteristics of a plurality of service providers, said profile data including identification data identifying each of said plurality of service providers;

receiving profile criteria and responsively searching said profile data for said profile criteria;

15 determining a portion of said profile data representing characteristics of a first of said plurality of service providers at least approximately match at least a portion of said profile criteria;

automatically generating a candidate selection prompt for a client to select said first service provider as a candidate for providing services to said client, said candidate selection prompt communicating a representation of said identification data identifying said first service provider;

20 receiving service summary information summarizing needed services and making said service summary information available to said first service provider;

automatically generating a prompt for said first service provider to agree to provide said needed services to said client;

25 providing a computer-based service module for use in providing services to said client or reporting the status of said services, said computer-based service module accessible by said client and said first service provider; and

receiving a payment from said first service provider.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein said first service provider is an attorney.

30 9. The method of claim 7, wherein said payment is for use of said computer-based service module.

10. The method of claim 7, wherein said computer-based service module automatically enforces certain standards that are more specific, or higher, than those generally accepted or legally required to practice in the industry of said first service provider.

5 11. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

receiving acknowledgment data from said client, said acknowledgment data representing said client's understanding of (1) rules for using said computer-based service module, (2) consequences of untruthful or misleading information provided by said client, or (3) information provided by said client becoming a permanent part of a
10 record of services, wherein said service summary information is made available to said first service provider only after said receiving of said acknowledgement.

12. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

receiving from said first service provider a password and responsively making available to said first service provider said service summary information and second
15 service summary information summarizing second services needed.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein said second services are needed by a second client.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein said service summary information and said second service summary information are accessible from a single web page.

20 15. The method of claim 7, wherein said matched portion of said profile criteria includes data representing foreign language skills.

16. The method of claim 7, wherein said matched portion of said profile criteria includes data representing an area serviced by said first service provider.

25 17. The method of claim 7, wherein said matched portion of said profile criteria includes data representing experience of said first service provider.

18. The method of claim 7, wherein said computer-based service module facilitates and stores communications between said first service provider and said client.

19. The method of claim 7, wherein said profile criteria include first and second profile criteria, the method further comprising:

30 assigning a first weight to said first profile criteria; and

assigning a second weight to said second profile criteria, said step of said determining performed by a computer after respectively applying said first and second weights to said first and second profile criteria.

20. The method of claim 7, wherein said matched portion of said profile criteria includes data representing a keyword provided by said client.

21. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

communicating in said candidate selection prompt a representation of no more than a predetermined maximum number of service providers having associated profile data at least partially matching said profile criteria.

22. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

communicating in said candidate selection prompt a representation of no less than a predetermined minimum number of service providers having associated profile data at least partially matching said profile criteria.

23. The method of claim 7, wherein said profile criteria represent a geographic area, said method further comprising:

communicating in said candidate selection prompt a representation of a first set of service providers for which a portion of said profile data represents a first area corresponding to said geographic area; and

communicating in said candidate selection prompt a representation of a second set of service providers for which a portion of said profile data represents a second area, said second area within a predetermined maximum distance from said first area.

24. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

providing over a network an electronic submission form having fields relevant to the needed services;

receiving said electronic submission form over said network; and

parsing data identifying said fields to extract data representing said service summary information;

25. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

notifying said first service provider that said client wants to consider hiring said first service provider.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein said notifying comprises automatically generating an email message to an email address of said first service provider, said email address represented in said profile data.
27. The method of claim 25, wherein said notifying comprises automatically generating a telephone call to a telephone number of said first service provider, said telephone number represented in said profile data.
28. The method of claim 26, further comprising:
generating a computer displayable representation of said service summary information accessible with a hyperlink, wherein said automatically generated email message includes said hyperlink;
29. The method of claim 24, further comprising:
prompting said first service provider to review said service summary information; and
prompting said first service provider to post a message to said client.
30. The method of claim 29, further comprising:
notifying said client that a message has been posted; and
prompting said client to review said posted message.
31. The method of claim 29, further comprising:
notifying said first service provider that a communication has been posted for said first service provider; and
prompting said first service provider to review said posted communication.
32. The method of claim 25, further comprising:
receiving a client password prior to said notifying of said first service provider.
33. The method of claim 29, further comprising:
receiving a first service provider password prior to prompting said first service provider to review said service summary information.
34. The method of claim 7, further comprising:
making available to said client a retainer agreement from said first service provider.
35. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

receiving or sending retainer negotiation messages to or from said client or said first service provider.

36. The method of claim 34, further comprising:

receiving a digital signature of said retainer agreement from said client.

5 37. The method of claim 34, further comprising:

billing said first service provider automatically upon execution of said retainer agreement.

38. The method of claim 37, further comprising:

10 automatically stopping billing of said first service provider when said first service provider completes rendering of said needed services.

39. The method of claim 34, further comprising:

verifying that said client has not signed a different retainer agreement since a predetermined date.

15 40. The method of claim 39, wherein said predetermined date is one year earlier than a current date.

41. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

receiving candidate selection data from said client in response to said candidate selection prompt, said candidate selection data identifying said first service provider and a second service provider; and

20 making available to said client via said computer-based service module (1) question or comment messages from said first or second service providers, (2) negotiation messages from said first or second service providers, or (3) retainer agreements from said first or second service providers.

42. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

25 receiving via said computer-based service module status information representing a status of services rendered; and

making available to said client via said computer-based service module said status information.

43. The method of claim 42, further comprising:

30 receiving via said computer-based service module case information from said client, said case information descriptive of or pertinent to said services rendered;

storing said status information and said case information in computer-readable media; and

making available via said computer-based service module said status information and said case information during the rendering of said services and for a predetermined time period following the rendering of said services.

44. The method of claim 43, further comprising:

storing said status information and said case information in a permanent medium.

45. The method of claim 42, wherein said computer-based service module prevents said first service provider from changing said status information after a fixed expiration period.

46. The method of claim 42, wherein said computer-based service module prevents said client from changing said status information.

47. The method of claim 42, wherein said case status information comprises:

case accounting data representing costs associated with the services provided by said first service provider.

48. The method of claim 42, wherein said status information comprises:

a services progress display representing actions said first service provider has taken on behalf of said client.

49. The method of claim 48, wherein said services progress display is in the form of a graphically represented meter, said meter having multiple gradation indicators, each of said multiple gradation indicators corresponding to one of a set of actions that have been or may be taken by said first service provider, said meter having a current reading indicator corresponding to an action most recently taken by said first service provider.

50. The method of claim 10, wherein said certain standards include a minimum frequency of communicating to said client.

51. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

prompting said client to enter rating information about said first service provider.

52. The method of claim 7 represented by instructions executable by a computer, said instructions stored on a computer-readable medium.

53. Status data representing past and current statuses of services rendered by a service provider, said status data comprising:

historic status data representing at least one non-current status of services rendered by a service provider, said historic status data accessible by a computer for read only viewing; and

current status data representing a current status of said services rendered by said service provider, said current status data accessible by a computer for read only viewing and accessible for a predetermined time for modification by said service provider, said predetermined time shorter than the time remaining to complete the rendering of said services.

54. Status data representing past and current statuses of services rendered by a service provider, said status data comprising:

historic service data descriptive of services rendered or to be rendered by a service provider, said historic service data accessible by a computer for read only viewing; and

current service data descriptive of services rendered or to be rendered by said service provider, said current service data more recent than said historic service data, said current service data accessible by a computer for read only viewing and accessible for a predetermined time for modification by a client of said service provider, said predetermined time shorter than the time remaining to complete the rendering of said services.

55. A service system facilitating the rendering of services, comprising:

profile data representing characteristics of a plurality of service providers, said profile data stored on a first computer-readable medium;

a search engine responsive to search criteria to search said profile data for portions of said profile data at least approximately matching said search criteria and to generate result data identifying service providers corresponding to said at least approximately matched portions of said profile data, said result data formatted for presentation, said search engine comprising instructions executable by a processor;

5 a communication module making available to a client said result data,
said communication module receiving candidate data representing a candidate
set of service providers comprising one or more of said service providers
identified by said result data, said communication module receiving and storing
said service summary data representing needed services and making said service
summary data available to each of said candidate set of service providers;

10 a case communication module receiving status data from a selected
service provider selected from said candidate set of service providers, said status
data representing a status of services provided by said selected service provider,
said case communication module storing said status data and making said status
data available to said client; and

a billing module generating a request for payment from said selected
service provider.

15 56. The service system as described in claim 55, wherein said payment is for use of
said case communication module.

57. The service system as described in claim 55, wherein said search criteria include
first and second profile criteria, the service system further comprising:

a first importance level assigned to said first profile criteria; and

20 a second importance level assigned to said second profile criteria, said
search engine configured to adjust said result data in accordance with said first
and second importance levels.

25 58. The service system as described in claim 57, wherein said adjusted result data
represent an ordered list of service providers, wherein a group of at least one of said
service providers is represented at the front of said list, and wherein portions of said
profile data representing characteristics of each of said at least one service providers in
said group matches said first profile criteria.

59. The service system as described in claim 55, wherein said profile data include
data representing service provider experience.

30 60. The service system as described in claim 55, wherein said profile data include
data representing an area serviced.

61. The service system as described in claim 55, wherein said profile data include data representing foreign language skills.

62. The service system as described in claim 57, wherein said first profile criteria include data representing experience, and said second profile criteria include data representing an area serviced.

63. The service system as described in claim 57, wherein said first importance level and said second importance level represent different levels of importance.

64. The service system as described in claim 55, wherein said case communication module enforces certain standards that are more specific, or higher, than those generally accepted or legally required to practice in the industry of said service provider.

65. A computer-based services system, comprising:

a message archive storing on a first computer-readable medium message timing data representing a date and a time of at least one message sent from a service provider to a client or from a client to a service provider;

an update timer comprising instructions stored on a second computer-readable medium, said instructions executable by a processor to access said message timing data to determine a latest message time corresponding to the most recent of said at least one messages and to calculate a response time by comparing said latest message time and a current time; and

a message generator automatically generating a warning message when said response time is greater than a predetermined response time.

66. The computer-based services system as described in claim 65, wherein said message generator automatically generates said warning message when fewer than a predetermined number of said at least one messages are dated later than a cut-off date, said cut-off date earlier than a current date by a predetermined number of days.

67. The computer-based services system as described in claim 65, wherein said predetermined response time is shorter than a maximum non-communication time representing a duration of non-communication between clients and service providers in the industry of said service providers longer than is generally accepted in said industry.

68. The computer-based services system as described in claim 65, wherein said predetermined response time is one month.

69. The computer-based services system as described in claim 65, further comprising:

an override time representing a period of time during which said message generator does not generate said warning message when said response time is greater than said predetermined response time.

70. The computer-based services system as described in claim 69, further comprising:

confirmation data stored on said first computer-readable medium, said confirmation data representing an agreement by a client that said service provider need provide no communication or status update during said override time.

71. The computer-based services system as described in claim 65, further comprising:

status update data stored in said message archive, said status update data representing at least one status update to inform said client about the status of services provided by said service provider, said message timing data representing a date and time of each of said at least one status update; and

a communication module responsive to a user request and to a change signal to permit said service provider to change a status update, said change signal generated by said update timer if a difference between a current time and a date and time associated with said status update is less than a predetermined change period.

72. The computer-based services system as described in claim 71, wherein said predetermined change period is twenty-four hours.

73. The computer-based services system as described in claim 65, further comprising:

a communication module responsive to a user request and to a change signal to permit said client to change selected data in said message archive, said change signal generated by said update timer if a difference between a current time and a time associated with said selected data is less than a predetermined change period.

74. A system for facilitating services, said system comprising:

means for representing with computer-readable data characteristics of and identification of a service provider;

5 means for allowing potential clients to search said characteristics over a computer network and receive a representation of data identifying said service provider; and

means for receiving agreement from said service provider to use a communication-enhancing system to provide services to each client obtained via said means for allowing potential clients to search said characteristics.

10 75. A system for facilitating services, said system comprising:

means for representing with computer-readable data characteristics of and identification of a service provider;

15 means for allowing potential clients to search said characteristics over a computer network and receive a representation of data identifying said service provider; and

means for receiving a representation from said service provider that said service provider meets certain minimum experience requirements, said experience requirements being more specific, or higher, than those generally accepted or legally required to practice in the industry of said service provider.

20 76. A method of facilitating services, said method comprising:

a step for providing in a profile database profile data representing characteristics of a plurality of service providers, said profile data including identification data identifying each of said plurality of service providers;

25 a step for using profile criteria to search said profile data and at least approximately match at least a portion of said profile criteria to characteristics of a first of said plurality of service providers;

a step for communicating an intent of said client to hire said service provider to provide services to said client;

30 a step for providing a computer network-based service module for use in providing said services to said client or reporting the status of said services, said

computer network-based service module accessible by said client and said service provider; and

a step for receiving an agreement from said service provider to use said computer-based service module in providing services to said client.

5 77. The method of claim 76, said method further comprising:

a step for providing an interface for communicating basic information to said client relating to said services, said interface comprising a graphic representation of an object relating to said services, regions of said graphic representation relating to corresponding parts of said object, said regions independently selectable to retrieve and present information to said client relating to said corresponding parts of said object.

10 78. The method of claim 77, wherein said object is a human body, wherein said regions correspond to parts of said human body, wherein said regions are selectable to present information to said client about body part injuries or operations, and wherein said services relate to legal or medical industries.

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